{See Note at end.}

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FREEDOM, FELLOWSHIP AND CHARACTER IN RELIGION.

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# DARWIN AND EMERSON.

A DISCOURSE DELIVERED BY RABBI S. H. SONNESCHEIN, AT TEMPLE SHAARE EMETH (GATES OF TRUTH), ST. LOUIS, MO.

There are two great forces underlying the current of modern history. One we call unity, the other we call liberty. We should be at a loss ever to find the key-note to these two great forces, harmonizing the evolution of our history, but for the one fact that the great thinkers and scholars of this age are constantly approaching nearer and nearer the great hidden realm where unity and liberty rest, so to speak, on the rock of ages.

Unity in nature, and liberty in men, are the two poles around which the history of modern times revolves; and they will never come to a stand-still for one reason, that the very secret of unity and liberty is,—to go on, to move onward and forward. This truth was known to a great many grand minds of old; but they kept it for themselves. The masses were not ripe for understanding and applying it.

Since about a hundred years; since a new continent has been developing itself, and a new race populating this new continent, we begin to understand that unity and liberty are not mere theorizing principles, but that they are the only practical application of human wisdom. One race,—and I say it with a great deal of deference and cheerfulness, though I do not belong to it,—one race has shown of late a great capability and capacity to grasp at these two great principles of unity and liberty; and that is the Anglo-Saxon race.

The Anglo-Saxons have given to humanity, within this enlightened century, two minds which have contributed much to the pending solution of the great riddle of these two great principles; the one born, and reared and dying—but living to immortality—in the old world, the other born and reared and living to immortality in the new world.

The one has been a great prophet of the past, a great discoverer of those hidden things which are gone, which are obliterated almost from vision; the man who has traced the imprints of primeval organic life, of the extinct progenitors of the human race, in the old world. The other has been a prophet of things to come; with a clear insight he has watched the development of a new race, has seen with keen and impartial eye the faults as well as the virtues of the American nation, the youthful race of a new world, and has pointed out not only possibilities, but certainties, which will here happen in the future of time.

What have they done to deserve such exceptional praise from a Jewish pulpit,

to be praised by the lips of a man who prides himself upon being a descendant of the old Semitic race of Hebrews, and thus without any reluctance giving over the palm of modern excellence to the scions of a comparatively modern race? What have they done to be so distinguished by this Hebrew pulpit? I will tell you what they have done.

There are a great many pillars of the Hebrew church, who with endurance and strength have borne the burden of the heavy truths which form the canopy of the temple of Israel, and there are these two gentiles carrying the same standard,—Darwin and Emerson. The one helped to establish the fact of Unity; the other, the fact of Liberty; and these two principles are the very elements which underlie and support and cap the structure of Israel's religion. First, the Unity of nature; *one* intelligent, immutable plan of creation from beginning without end, to end without beginning; and second, the Liberty of man, which means, that the human soul is endowed with the innate will-power to choose between wrong and right. Every spiritual being is a free agent. Thou hast to choose. It is in thine own hands to go under or to ascend, to be obliterated or to become immortal. It is within thine own choice. Liberty is the law of humanity.

These two principles are the only surviving elements of the Hebrew religion. All the others will go, or have gone. *One* God, and a *free* man. Darwin and Emerson have sustained these two principles against and amid a great deal of noise, turmoil, speculation, criticism, agnosticism, and I know not what "ism" else; and a Jewish preacher has a right to say, "God bless the memory of Darwin and Emerson!"

What have they said, what have they done? We are told that the world is created by a spiritual Omnipotence. This *is* an everlasting truth. We have been instructed by the Scriptures of tradition that this creative Being made the world at a certain time, and at a certain succession of periods; that he organized each species immutably for whatever it has been destined for. The modern mind cannot grasp, still less, believe in *such* a Creator. Is God a watchmaker? Is the world simply a clock that is wound up by the invisible hand of the Great Watchmaker; and is each little part and particle of that great clock made for its purpose, immutably so? Must the spring remain a spring, the wheel remain a wheel, and the key remain a key for all time to come? Are we simply tools in the hands of the great Mechanic above us? If we are simply tools, where is our liberty? Where is our responsibility? Where is the nobility of man? That is the great question, which haunts the mind of the thinker day and night. Men felt that they were not tools, but they could not demonstrate it until Darwin, that man of blessing came, who has helped us to the truth, who has given the facts,—grand testimony to liberty in man. From the lowest type of organic nature, man has so far risen to the summit of the scale by his own exertion, by his own adaptability to surrounding circumstances, by his own courage to resist dangerous influences, by his own experience and intellect, by his own free will. We are no tools, we are free. It is in our hands to become either nobler than we now are, or to degrade ourselves to the lowest round in the ladder of bestiality. That argument is the work of Darwin, of Charles Darwin, to show man free by the demonstration of nature and science. Is that a degradation? Which is nobler,—to be the offspring of some primeval being, half-ape, half-man, or to be the descendant of Adam, who came out of the hands of the Creator, pure and grand and immortal, but, being tempted, fell, and fell forever, to be redeemed only by some miraculous and partial intervention of his Maker?

It is nobler, I say, to be the descendant of an animal and become man, than to first be man and then fall down to the lowest pit of animalism.

Liberty, that grand watchword of modern times, has been given to man under Darwin's deed of trust, which no power can obliterate any more. So one point of the Hebrew faith is safe, beyond any danger and fear and doubt. But there the case cannot rest. Though Darwin protests emphatically that he does not believe in the mere *blind chance* of

evolution; though, with his acute and calm intellect, he does not miss a single opportunity, wherever it offers itself, to declare most emphatically that he believes in the *intelligence* of the law of evolution; though he says distinctly that the human mind possesses a God-like intellect—that is what his words are, "a God-like intellect,"—which penetrates the mysteries of nature; though Darwin says this, there are some men who like to dabble in truth, and who would make us believe that the great law of evolution is the outcome of mere mechanical forces. What those mechanical forces are they do not know. If you ask them about anything which is above the mere facts accessible to sight and touch and common sense, they do not know. Were the modern world with its craving for liberty to accept such thought, it would be prone to shatter and destroy all authority in order to be so free as to defy even the laws of nature. The lofty scheme of egotism would prevail. "I am free, I am free to struggle for my existence, even if it cost the lives of a hundred thousand creatures like me. I have a title to my liberty, and I am going to fight it out with the strength of my muscle and the force of my intellect, no matter how many may suffer"; this would be the outcome of liberty that is simply the fruit of blind chance and the mechanical construction of the universe.

We need somebody else who will teach us, besides Liberty, the keynote to Unity; that we are responsible for each other, that there is one common artery or soul-life pervading the whole of nature; that from the smallest worm on earth to the largest sun in heaven, the soul is everywhere, and that we are bound to each other by invisible but adamantine chains of spirituality, of intelligence, of unity. This is Emerson's doctrine and faith. It is true that the man who has given us assurance of all this has not given us a system, has not revealed to us a theology, has not brought down that soul, and demonstrated it to man. But do you not know that, from time immemorial, none of these great revelations of spirituality could be brought to a system that would last? They have always failed, because how can man systematically grasp at his spirit? Let him grasp at it, it will melt and dissolve in his very hands. But there are certain truisms which, in their aphoristic language, plain and sublime at once, come home to the mind and sentiment of the possessor and the reader. "That is truth", the soul exclaims, "it cannot be otherwise!" And such fragmentary knowledge of the truth—of the unity of the soul-life in entire nature, has been given us by the man, Emerson. He tells us that, though we live in succession and division, in parts and in particles, we are still following that one great current of unity which involves the whole boundless universe; that the soul is the same creative spirit in man, as the supreme universal soul is the great creative spirit of the world; and that God is not a Mechanic, but a methodic Educator. He teaches us that the time will come, when men "will not weave their lives in spotted, shred-like patterns, but when they will come to act with energies which are immortal"; when they will not regard fragmentary truths, but the truth as a whole, a unit; when all the currents of human thought will fall into one line, straight and firm and onward. That man gave us unity. He has revealed it in the new world where men of all races come together, where men of all different religions come together, where men with the most impulsive tendencies of nature come together, but where, nevertheless, they are united by the one noble idea of national liberty.

None of the American thinkers save Emerson have given unmistakable utterance to this idea for the future salvation of the race. For the first time, at the spring-tide of the new world, with a young race in a young Republic, he gave us proofs of the fulfillment of that high vision. His very words which he applied to the old Bible,—

> "Out of the heart of nature rolled
> The burden of the Bible old,"—

these very words can be applied to the new revelation which he advocated when he said, "We shall come to look at the world with new eyes and enjoy an original revelation."

We have a larger range and action than our ancestors had, and we may predict for posterity the words:

"Out from the heart of nature grew
The doctrine of a Bible new."

That new Bible will be written. Do not believe that the old Bible is immutable, given to be retained in every syllable. This old Bible is itself simply a test and a proof of the great truism,—the survival of the fittest, the adaptation to circumstances and the struggle for existence. We shall sift it, we shall condense it, part of it will be retained as an organic type for the great truths to come that are developing themselves, and a *new* Bible will be written:

"Out of the heart of nature grew
The doctrine of a Bible new,
For Christian, Infidel and Jew."

Darwin and Emerson, like Moses and Isaiah and Jeremiah and all the other great minds of the old Hebrews, and like Jesus and Paul of the new dispensation, —Darwin and Emerson will stand forth boldly among the writers and the prophets of the new Bible for the people. It will never differ from the old in its tendency, in its character,—it will prove the facts that have been promised in the old Bible.

Unity and Liberty are like fire and water. There was a war of secession twenty years ago. The Union had to be saved by force. Unity had to be supported by blood. Liberty was nowhere. No one could say, "I am for secession", lest he be put in prison. Unity seemed to be antagonistic to Liberty. You can unite people, you can unite nations, you can unite humanity only by dint of force, of coercion. If I always do as I please, what I deem best to my own interests, then we shall be kept asunder and be separated in our interests. Liberty seems to be the hot-bed of secession and separation. How will the two things be united, consolidated, reconciled? Fire and water, looked at superficially, are the fiercest enemies to each other. Fire evaporates water, water extinguishes fire. But look a little deeper into the mysteries of the two elements. They are really the truest helpmates to each other. They are mutually friendly elements. Fire melts, makes everything fluid. Water contains the most fierce, fiery element we know. So it is with Unity and Liberty. Superficially considered, they are the greatest enemies: but look deeper, look beneath the surface, and they are the greatest mutual helpmates you can find in the intellectual universe.

Thrice blessed are the names of the two great princes of peace who have begun to prove that Unity and Liberty are simply correlative names for one grand spiritual force, which short-sighted man so far has not seen. But let us believe in this Great Power with many Hebrew seers of old, who maintained from the beginning that the unity and the liberty of the human race are to be traced back to the eternal and hidden Creator, and that Liberty and Unity will finally be recognized and accepted by all. Amen.

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Our "Church-Door Pulpit" hints its purpose in its name. It aims to furnish fortnightly a transfigured tract,—transfigured by being paid for, and by representing not so much a given system of beliefs as the emphasis, in somewhat varying beliefs, on "Freedom, Fellowship and Character in Religion;" this tract to be taken from the rack or table at the church-door to the home, there to serve its little mission by reading in the family, lending to a neighbor, mailing to a distant friend, etc. The choice of subject is left to the writers, and *each writer is responsible for his own utterance alone, and for nothing else in the series.*

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